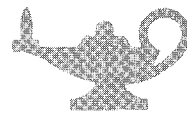


Epilogue



The 45th Rifle Division of the 131st Rifle Corps remained in Kirkenes and assisted the local population in preparing for the coming winter. A Norwegian military mission arrived in Murmansk on 9 November and went to Kirkenes the following day.¹ Over the next several months, small detachments of Norwegian soldiers from England and Sweden arrived in Murmansk and were subordinated to the 14th Army for operations on Norwegian territory. The exiled government of Norway was allowed to send naval vessels into Kirkenes harbor in early December. By the end of January 1945, the number of troops reached 1,350 and, by the war's end in May, 2,735. Soviet forces withdrew from Norwegian territory in October 1945, leaving the border as it had stood since 1807.

Combat experience gained in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation was quickly exploited when, in late 1944 and early 1945, many Soviet commanders, staffs, and units were transferred to other fronts. Army General Meretskov was promoted to marshal in November 1944 and, in the spring of 1945, transferred to Khabarovsk in eastern Siberia to command the 1st Far Eastern Front in the campaign against Japanese forces in Korea and Manchuria. His entire Front staff and the commander of the 7th Air Army, Lieutenant General Sokolov, preceded him. In August and September 1945, Meretskov's forces operated on extremely difficult coastal terrain, coordinating their actions with amphibious operations by naval infantry units of the Pacific Fleet.

The 20th Svirsk Assault Combat Engineer Brigade was also transferred to the 1st Far Eastern Front, where its units conducted conventional and special operations against Japanese forces. Under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel D. A. Krutskikh, who had organized and trained the special-purpose units of the Karelian Front, special-purpose soldiers of the 20th Svirsk, on 9 August, neutralized an important Japanese position blocking the army on the Front's main axis. Later in August, the same units participated in air-landing operations against the Japanese garrisons in Harbin and Girin.² In 1982, Krutskikh was a general officer and chief of staff of civil defense of the R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Republic).

The 126th and 127th Light Rifle Corps appeared in southern Poland in February 1945 as the 126th and 127th Mountain Rifle Corps, with the same commanders and numbered brigades. Both corps fought through the moun-

tains of north-central Czechoslovakia with the 4th Ukrainian Front and finished the war against Germany east of Prague.³ The 72d Naval Rifle Brigade of the 126th Light Rifle Corps, replenished with healthy young men from other units, deployed to the Far East in the summer of 1945.⁴ In January and February of 1945, the 10th Guards, 65th (renamed 101st Guards), and 114th (renamed 102d Guards) Rifle Divisions of the 99th Rifle Corps (renamed 40th Guards) and the 14th Rifle Division of the 131st Rifle Corps were all sent to the 19th Army in East Prussia.⁵ The 19th participated in combat operations along the Baltic coast as part of the 2d Belorussian Front and finished the war near the German island of Rugen, northeast of Rostock. One corps from this army occupied the Danish island of Bornholm.⁶

Senior Lieutenant Leonov and over forty men of his fleet reconnaissance detachment went to the Pacific Fleet in May 1945.⁷ Leonov became commander of the reconnaissance detachment of Headquarters, Pacific Fleet, and his "northerners" assumed leadership positions in the detachment. In August 1945, Leonov's new command distinguished itself in four landing operations against Japanese-held Korean ports, earning "guards" status. On 14 August 1945, Leonov earned his second Hero of the Soviet Union award for heroism and courage. He retired from active service in 1956 and now lives in Moscow.

Many officers who participated in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation remained in service after the war and reached positions of great responsibility. For example, Major P. S. Kutakhov, who was the commander of a fighter regiment in the 7th Air Army that supported the offensive, became the commander in chief of the Air Forces of the U.S.S.R. in 1969 and held that post until his death in 1984.⁸ Lieutenant Colonel N. V. Ogarkov, who was the deputy chief of the operations section of the Karelian Front engineer staff, became chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the U.S.S.R. in 1977, a post he held until 1984.⁹ Lieutenant Colonel G. E. Peredelskii, who in October 1944 commanded the divisional artillery regiment of the 367th Rifle Division of the 31st Rifle Corps, was named the commander in chief of Rocket Forces and Artillery of Ground Forces in 1969, a post he held until 1983.¹⁰ He died early in 1988. Colonel S. L. Sokolov, a senior staff officer in the Directorate of Tank and Mechanized Forces of the Karelian Front in 1944, became the minister of defense of the U.S.S.R. in 1984 and held that post until his retirement in mid-1987 after the Mathais Rust incident.¹¹

After the war, Marshal Meretskov commanded several military districts in turn, including the Moscow Military District. In 1955, he became the deputy minister of defense for higher military-academic institutions. He entered the General Inspectorate in April 1964 and died in December 1968.¹²

In April 1946, Admiral Golovko became the deputy and, in February 1947, the chief of staff of the Main Naval Staff in Moscow. In 1950–52, he was chief of the Naval General Staff and first deputy of the naval minister. From 1952 to 1956, Golovko commanded the 4th and Baltic Fleets and then returned to Moscow to become the first deputy to the commander in chief of the Soviet Navy. Golovko died in 1962 at the age of 56.¹³

Lieutenant General Shcherbakov remained in the European theater and, after the war, commanded the Baltic and Archangel Military Districts (1945—49). From 1949 to 1953, he commanded the Gorkii Military District and then went to the Voronezh Military District to be the deputy commander until his retirement in 1957. He died in 1981.¹⁴

The Petsamo-Kirkenes area today is quiet. The border is marked by both Soviet and Norwegian posts, and on the Soviet side, there is a fence to prevent the migration of caribou. On the Norwegian side of the border, small guard towers look out over the barren landscape. Norwegian soldiers concern themselves both with activities across the border and with the summer migration of European tourists, who would remove Soviet border markers. A single border crossing point just west of Tarnet is used to pass an occasional logging truck from the U.S.S.R. into Norway. Sensitive to the security concerns of the Soviet Union, the government of Norway does not allow NATO forces to train or terrain walk in this area.

On the Soviet side of the border, the former German airfields at Luostari and Salmiiarvi are now military airfields. Forces permanently stationed in the area include the 45th Rifle Division, the 63d Kirkenes Naval Infantry Brigade, an artillery brigade, air assault units, and other unidentified formations, all of which are trained and equipped for arctic combat.¹⁵
